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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001432

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MAS](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: MILITARY CHIEF YANO DISCUSSES KEY CHALLENGES WITH
AMBASSADOR

REF: A. MANILA 1402: COUNTER TERRORISM AND THE PEACE
PROCESS IN THE PHILIPPINES
[1](#)B. MANILA 1399: TOP BROADCAST JOURNALIST ABDUCTED
IN MINDANAO
[1](#)C. MANILA 1192: FORMER MILITARY CHIEF TO HEAD PEACE
PROCESS
[1](#)D. MANILA 1177: PACOM COMMANDER AND AMBASSADOR CALL
ON NEW ARMED FORCES CHIEF

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: During a June 11 private breakfast with the Ambassador, Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Alexander Yano cited as major challenges over the next three months the stalled peace process with Muslim insurgents, a recent increase in violence and bombings, upcoming elections in Muslim Mindanao, the recent kidnapping of a popular television journalist by the Abu Sayyaf Group, and the upcoming typhoon season. In an echo of his strong emphasis on ethics and personal responsibility, Yano discussed his recent meeting with some of the soldiers who remain in custody after being convicted for their participation in the plot to overthrow the government of President Arroyo in July 2003, telling them they must "face the consequences" of their actions. Yano also offered that the New People's Army was becoming more criminal than ideological in nature, as indicated by their recent actions against commercial establishments in Mindanao. Yano also reaffirmed his commitment to hunting down terrorists and other high-value individuals. END SUMMARY.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

[1](#)2. (C) In a June 11 private breakfast with the Ambassador, newly appointed Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff Alexander Yano (ref d) cited issues that he considered among his top immediate challenges. Yano was concerned about the pullout of the Malaysian contingent from the International Monitoring Team and its impact on the stalled peace process with Muslim insurgents. Yano, the first native of Mindanao to serve in this position, expressed his desire for a lasting peace agreement. He spoke positively of his previous experience as chairman of the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities, the panel overseeing the ceasefire with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). He said he considered the ceasefire committee an effective body, and noted that it enabled him to get to know many of the key MILF leaders, many of whom he considered sensible and committed to achieving a lasting peace. Yano added that he and his predecessor, General Esperon, who now serves as the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process (ref c), are

strongly committed to the peace process and understand the need for continuing progress. But the situation would become increasingly difficult if the lack of progress in peace talks continued, especially given the rogue MILF and terrorist elements who were outside of the MILF leadership's control. Yano found himself in the position of "hoping for the best, but preparing for the worst" in dealing with the security situation in Mindanao. Given that the peace process is central to the U.S. strategy to separate a few dozen significant terrorists from 12,000 insurgents in southern Philippines (ref a), the Ambassador reiterated to General Yano the USG's strong interest in and support for a negotiated settlement.

13. (C) General Yano also voiced concerned about the recent kidnapping of well-known ABS-CBN television journalist Ces Drilon and her camera crew by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) (ref b). Yano expressed concern about Drilon's fate and said the AFP was actively involved in efforts to resolve this incident peacefully, but also voiced frustration about journalists traveling in a dangerous, isolated area of Mindanao against the advice of military and law enforcement officials. While he understood that journalists had a right to track stories wherever they might lead, now he and the military would have to spend considerable time and resources in trying to solve the problem.

14. (C) General Yano spoke of his recent visit with some of the soldiers who remain in custody after being convicted for their participation in the plot to overthrow the government of President Arroyo in July 2003. According to Yano, the

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soldiers emphasized that they meant no disrespect to the military and that they truly "loved" the Army. In keeping with his strong emphasis on ethics and respect for civilian authority on the part of the military, General Yano told the Ambassador that on the advice of his lawyer he did not discuss any possible plea agreement with the soldiers and stressed to them that they must "face the consequences" of their actions.

NEW POSITION, NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

15. (C) General Yano reaffirmed his commitment to hunting down high value targets using targeted military operations coupled with civil-military activities and agreed with the Ambassador this combination of "hard" and "soft" power was instrumental in the on-going success against terrorist elements in Mindanao. Yano added that gaining and maintaining the good will of the local populace in these regions, which were once considered safe havens for terrorists, is the most productive method of mitigating support for terrorism. General Yano also informed the Ambassador that he will soon accompany President Arroyo on a three-day trip to eastern Mindanao to assess recent activities attributed to the communist New People's Army (NPA) in that region. In an aside, Yano noted that while he has a strong relationship with Secretary of National Defense Teodoro, he has no track record with President Arroyo and this upcoming trip would be an important opportunity. General Yano and the Ambassador concurred that recent alleged NPA activity in Mindanao indicate that the NPA is becoming more of a criminal gang using extortion and kidnapping as a way to generate income, as opposed to an ideologically driven organization seeking political change.

16. (C) In addition to expressing appreciation for his recent meetings with U.S. counterpart Admiral Mullen and PACOM Commander Admiral Keating shortly after assuming his new position (ref d), General Yano thanked the Ambassador for the ongoing visit of the USNS MERCY and its successful humanitarian missions in Samar, a region which he said has unfortunately been neglected in the past. The Ambassador thanked him for his support of the USNS MERCY visit and

informed him that a recent helicopter shooting incident, which is still being investigated, did not have any significant impact on USNS MERCY's humanitarian activities.

17. (C) During the breakfast, General Yano reaffirmed his previous public comments that he would ensure Philippine military personnel adhere to a strict code of conduct, with no tolerance for favoritism. He explained that he would be traveling more throughout the Philippines in the near future to meet with his commanders in the field. Despite knowing some of them as classmates at the Philippine Military Academy and many of them throughout his Army career, General Yano commented that, in his new position, he would have to treat his former colleagues "differently." He emphasized that his younger brother Cesar, a Colonel in the Philippine Army, can expect "no special favors or treatment" from him.

COMMENT

18. (C) General Yano, the eldest son of two public school teachers, is a firm believer in public service and has consistently professed an allegiance to the rule of law since his appointment as Armed Forces Chief of Staff. Instilled with a strict sense of discipline from his parents at an early age, General Yano appears willing to take on what some see as pervasive graft and corruption in the military. Thus far, his private comments have matched his public statements regarding respect for human rights and maintaining integrity in the Armed Forces.

KENNEY